

[Buster Degraftenreid]

Interview

Mrs. Belle Kilgore

718 Wallace Street

Clovis, New Mexico 2 [?]

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1500 Words

BUSTER DEGRAFTENREID

Melrose, New Mexico

I called on Mr. Degraftenreid last Monday. He was asleep. He has been feeling ill ever since the Pioneer Day Celebration at Clovis the first days of June.

He came out on the porch with a smile on his face and a brown cigarette paper in his hand. I had met him several days before at Clovis, and had asked for an interview.

"I do not recall very much about my family, but we have been on the move westward ever since the first of the Degraftenreids came to America from England. They went from North Carolina, to South Carolina then to Kentucky (where I was born) from there to Arkansas and to Grayson, county near Carpenters Bluff, Texas. There were three brothers in my grandfather's family, John, Creed, (my grandfather) and Solman.

"We came to Texas in company with several other families a among them were Pa Rogers. My wife was a Rogers and we were sweethearts when we were children, but my

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father moved farther west and I did not see her for fifteen years. We came out to New Mexico about 1881, (some say the year that Billy the Kid was killed), and settled [near?] Alamagorda Creek not far from Fort Sumner.

"It was about 1882 that I spent the winter with George and John [Causey?], who were buffalo hunters. Well, there were not many buffaloes left. For the years of [?] [1875?] to 1880 were the great years of buffalo hunting. This year, 1882, the buffaloes 2 were scarce and did not run in great herds like they did in 1875 to 1880. C18 - N. Mex. 6/5/41 - But I told that to man from the Clovis paper and you get that from him.

"One year I went over into the mountains beyond Roswell and coming back thro'ugh them canyons I had to go up a canyon. I was away from the rest of the boys, I think I was over near the White mountains and Capitan. Anyway I was horseback and as it was getting late i had to get somewhere to stay all night. I saw a smoke and tho'ught it would be a camp of Indians. When I came up I knew it was the Geronimo Indians. I went up to the camp the tepees were built in a circle, and in the center was a fire. There were about forty or fifty Indians and I did not know what to do. I finally screwed up enough courage to ask if I could stay all night. I could talk Mex and they seemed to under-stand me. After a few minutes the chief came out and I asked him if I could stay all night. He looked me over and asked me where I had been where, I was going and several other questions. I got off my horse, and the Indians standing took by gun off me and off the horse, before I knew what they were doing. "I turned to the chief and said, "You said I could stay all night with you and I am looking to you for protection.". The old chief said some thing in his Indian language then they all became very friendly. he then said that I could sleep in his tepee. I walked up to the fire where several Indian bucks were. I noticed that my horse had been turned loose. I looked 3 around very anxiously, but the Indians said that my horse would be there in the morning. We then stood around the fire, watching the boys cooking. They had big hunks of meat stuck on sticks and holding them over the fire, browning them. They looked good and smelt better. I was tired and hungry and anything would have tasted good to me. I stepped up behind an young Indian caught him by the shoulder, pulled him back and took

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his stick with the meat on it and began to eat, before he realized what had been done. He looked purty mad for a minute, but as the others were [?] yelling and laughing, he began to laugh, too, and then got him another piece of meat and started to cook it. They had come very good cofee.

After awhile the Indian were all going off to hunt. I said that I did not know how to hunt deer, so Geronimo said that I could wait 'til tomorrow and he would show me how. We soon went to bed in the tepee. I asked about my horse but they said he would be there in the morning.

We went into the tepee and there was a big bed of coals in the center of the tent and on each side of the tent were beds of grass and skins. The chief and his two squaws slept on one side of the tepee and I on the other side of the fire. They put the flap down and when the fir went out some one would build it up. It was so hot in there that you could sleep witho'ut any thing on. We went to bed but not to sleep much and I was up by the crack of day. The others were up out around the fire.

4

The Indians began to go around in twos and threes and soon disappeared. I asked what they were doing, the Indian chief said that they were going to hunt elk. [?] He asked me if I could hunt elk I told him that I could not. "Well, you go with me, I show you how."

I walked more than a mile and a-half, and he turned to me, and said gruffly, "You don't know to hunt deer".

He would walk five feet and stoop and squat and then walk seven feet and do the same thing. Not a sound of anything could be heard when he walked on his moccasins, but the would crack under my feet and the tho'rns would scratch on my pants and the Indian would show that he was mad. We did not get any deer and went back to the tepees.

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There was great excitement in camp when we got back, The Indians were talking and were looking at me with angry faces. I did not know what to make of it. A horse had come in with his saddle on and his bridle reins upon the horse's neck. All were looking at me suspiciously. They began to ask me questions and if I had anybody with me. I knew I was in a bad fix. If some one has shot that Indian from his horse, they would think that it was some one with me. If he was found dead my life would not be worth a dime. I looked around for my horse but he was gone. Everything was getting dangerous like, and I again began to tell the truth that I had been with some of the ranchers over near the Capitan and White mountains and was going back to Roswell. After awhile the other Indians who had been 5 out looking for the missing one, came and had him with them. They were laughing at him. He said that he [?] got down quickly to shoot a deer and forgot to take the reins of his horse's neck an and the horse ran away from him and came back to camp. It seemed as if they could not rag him enough about it. But I was surely relieved. By gosh, my life would not been worth the snap of my finger, if that danged old buck had been found dead. They never would have believed me. Well, everything was pleasant again. I staid that day for an eagle hunt.

The Indians never kill an eagle, unless they want the beak and claws. They find a high bald rock with a crevice in it and place sticks and brusks over the crevice. An Indian gets in the crack and places himself so as he cannot be seen. He holds up a stick with a rabbit or some small live animal on it and moves it up and down. An eagle will sight it away off high in the air. He will began to make large circles flying lower and lower each time making smaller circles and finally with a swift downward swoop grab the rabbit, but as quick as he is the hidden Indian is quicker and zip, the Indian's free hand grabs the eagle by the feet and it is impossible to get away from that death grip of the Indian.

They use the feathers for decoration and know just how to pull the feathers out witho'ut injuring the shafts or tearing the skins. When the Indians have all the feathers from an eagle they want, they turn him loose. He can fly away for they leave the necessary

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feathers for him to fly with. They keep the eagles sometimes and feed him so that his feathers are brighter than when they caught him.

6

The "Hanted" Cabin

"Yes, there are quite a few stories about ghosts and "Hants" over in the Cuneva country. That country lies southwest of here and is full of rough canyons, some of them are wooded and some of the are bare and rocky. There is a story about a captain and a corporal who always took the pay roll to the soldiers stationed away over in the Indian reservation, I believe it was the Mascaleros or some other tribe, maybe. But there are so many different ones that it dosenot matter. These Indians were savage and nearly [always?] on the warpath. Then there were some white men that had gone wilder.

At night the Captain and the corporal would bury the money and one of them sleep with his eye open and take turn about watching the money. Next morning they would take up the money and go. Well, they came to where the soldiers were supposed to be, but there was neither hair nor hide of them. The Captain started back, one night they buried the money and the Indians came up on them unknown, and were prowling all round. The Indians tried to make the men tell where the money was, but the men would not. So the Indians tortured them before they killed the soldiers. It was supposed that the Indians found the money and took it to a cabin. Any way there was a change in the Indians and they seemed to have more horses and showed signs of having got possesion of something.

The way these Indians tortured the men would be to cut their veins and let the blood gurgle out the Indians snarling all the time.

Some man said he tried to stay in the old cabin and 7 and they said they could something water being poured out of a [?] jug gurgling, and the lamp would not stay lit, and when the light went out, there would be a snarling just like a dog before your face.

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Now this cabin was a rock one with one door and one window and nothing could get in only by this door and window. Some of the cowboys said they were going to stay there anyway. So three of them went to stay all night. They went to bed with the light burning, and talked a long time to each one dozing off. They noticed that the light was out and each one supposed that the other one had turned or blowed out the light. One of them woke the others. "Did you blow out the light?" he asked and they said no that they didn't." "I heard something he said, I'm going to light the lamp." He lighted the lamp and soon it went out and then a gurgling noise began and thr snarling of a dog right in their faces. They got up and run out of the house, but as they got in some cactus, they said, "Hell, no ghost is goin' to keep us away."

So they went back toward the cabin and it was dark and quie quiet, They went in lighted the lamp and went to bed, theydid not hear anything, but suddenly the light went out, the gurgling sound began again and the snarling dog was in their faces.

They grabbed their clothes and one of them said, "Hell, if there is a ghost, just let him have it." and the boysdid not ever try to sleep in the cabin anymore. But others have been lost in that country and when they would try to stay there, they would hear that gurgling and snarling. So they say it is haunted by the spirit of the soldiers the Indians killed.